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MESSAGE

OF

THE MAYOR,

TO THE BOARDS OF

Aldermen and Common Council

OF THE

CITY OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

BY

SAYLES J. BOWEN, MAYOR.

DELIVERED JUNE 29, 1868.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
CHRONICLE PRINT.
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Washington, D.C. Mayor, 1868-1869 (S.J. Bowen)

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MESSAGE.

To the Board of Aldermen and Board of Common Council of the City of Washington D. C.

GENTLEMEN: The disorganized and confused state of affairs which has existed since I entered on the discharge of my duties has prevented me from obtaining such information as is necessary to enable me to make a detailed statement of the condition of things as they now exist, or to recommend such action as may be requisite to improve and correct it. I shall, therefore, limit this communication to what I deem the most important measures that will present themselves for your consideration and disposal.

THE CITY DEBT.

The funded debt of the city is as follows:

Six per cent. quarterly stock	$680,101 22
Five per cent. quarterly stock	61,307 00
Six per cent. water stock	155,000 00
Six per cent. canal stock	48,800 00
Total amount of funded debt	$945,208 22

The floating debt ascertained and estimated is—

On account of Schools	$200,000
Police	21,633
Levy Court	13,000
Interest due July 1	15,000
Washington Gaslight Company	40,000
Reward for arrest of Murderers of Abraham Lincoln.	20,000
Contractors and others, say	200,000
	$509,633

This sum is probably considerably less than the actual amount due, but is as nearly correct as it is possible to make it from all the information that could be obtained in the limited time I have had.

The floating debt, some of it long since due, should be provided for at once. It is too late to discuss the causes that led to it, or the swindling operations that have plunged the city into its financial difficulties. By proper means this debt can be paid, and the credit of the city restored to what it was before it was placed under the control of men reckless of the expenditure of its revenues, who appear to have administered the affairs of the Corporation in the interest of themselves and a horde of cormorants and speculators by whom they were surrounded. I recommend that application be made to Congress for authority to issue bonds in denominations of $50, $100, $500, and $1 000, with interest at six per cent. per annum, payable semi-annually, for the sum of $550,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary to pay the debt existing on the 30th instant, payable in ten years from date, or sooner, if the Corporation desires; the redemption of said bonds to be provided for by a sinking fund, to be set apart annually for that purpose from the regular revenues of the city, such bonds to be used only for the extinguishment of said debt. These bonds, it is believed, would be readily taken by the creditors of the Corporation in payment of their demands, and then the city would be able to commence anew, unembarrassed by importunate creditors, and to conduct its affairs on the principle of "pay as you go," the only safe and prudent course for this or any other Corporation to pursue.

In a future communication it is my expectation to furnish you with a detailed statement of the anticipated revenues of the city from all sources, as well as the various sums required to be expended for different objects during the year. Thus far I have been unable to obtain information on which to base a reliable statement in regard to these matters.

OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM.

The school system in this city, in my opinion, could be vastly improved by placing the same under the control of a Board of Education, and providing for at least two competent superintendents to examine into the qualifications, and to oversee, supervise and direct the teachers in the discipline, management, course of studies, and details of the school-rooms. Some have

advocated the mixing of white and colored children in the same schools; but my experience and observation satisfy me that it is at present impracticable. The colored people are opposed to it, and so strong is the prejudice of many of our white citizens that they would prefer their children to remain in ignorance rather than send them to a school where children of color are permitted to attend. Thus one class of children would be deprived of an education, which, more than anything else, serves in the end to soften and destroy the unnatural prejudice against color that has been engendered by the institution of slavery.

At present, therefore, I would advise separate schools for each class.

GOVERNMENT AID NEEDED.

The support of these schools is a heavy burthen on our people, a large portion of which should be borne by the United States. It is estimated that not more than two fifths of the children now living in the city (all of whom should have an opportunity to attend public schools) belong to families permanently residing here. The remainder are children of such as are officers of the General Government, or those whom the fortunes of the late war brought here, none of whom own property or pay taxes into the city treasury. It is not fair that we should be taxed to educate their children, and I am satisfied that with a proper representation and application to Congress for aid in this direction, we will be successful, particularly as this city has never received any assistance from that quarter, while all the States have been recipients of its bounty for educational purposes. I recommend that application to Congress be made for an appropriation equal to one half the sum required to support our schools, conditioned on the raising of the same amount by the city authorities for the same purpose.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS.

Attention is requested to the school-house in course of erection at the corner of Thirteenth and K streets. The work has progressed so far that it can hardly be stopped at this time without injury to the walls and other portions of the structure, and yet the Corporation is without funds, and there is due the contractor about $60,000, which he claims and is much in need

of Of course this and other similar indebtedness can only be paid as funds are collected by the Corporation, and the question is submitted for your consideration whether, under the circumstances, the work shall go on until the building is under roof, and thus secured from damage, or stop and wait until means are collected to pay for what has been done, and then put it in condition to be occupied.

The policy of erecting such a building, which, with the ground and furniture, will cost nearly $200,000, was, in my opinion, questionable. While other portions of the city are destitute of school buildings, and there was scarcely money enough to pay the necessary teachers, the revenues for school purposes for nearly two years should never have been absorbed to build a single house, which at best will not accommodate one-tenth of the children of the city! Good, substantial school-houses could have been built in every ward for less than the cost of this. Now we build one, and all other parts of the city are destitute!

CONDITION OF OUR STREETS.

Attention is called to the filthy condition of the streets and alleys, and the necessity for taking immediate steps to improve them as a sanitary measure. Unless that be done, disease and pestilence will overtake us as certain as cause produces effect. The total absence of means to defray even the incidental expenses attendant upon the execution of the laws of the Corporation, prevents me from attempting to employ a force sufficient to perform this necessary work without authority from the Councils. I am unwilling to increase the indebtedness of the city, and put a further strain upon its credit, until there has been some provision made for meeting the entire demand. No delay can be afforded in regard to this matter, and I trust the Councils will not adjourn this evening without indicating the policy proper to be pursued.

REMOVAL OF THE CENTRE MARKET.

The Senate of the United States has passed a bill providing for the removal of the Centre Market to a point on or near the canal, between Tenth and Twelfth streets west. This bill will be acted on in the House immediately, and, as it is a matter of

the greatest importance to the city, I invite your attention to the fact, and request that you will give it the consideration it deserves. That the market should be removed from its present site, where it has been an eye-sore and a nuisance for a generation, is the judgment of every well-wisher of Washington; but whether a more appropriate and convenient location than that indicated in the Senate bill could not be secured, is a question in which all should take an interest. It is also important that an effort be made to secure to the city, if possible, a transfer by the General Government of the site on which the present market is located, the proceeds from the sale of which would go far toward paying the expense of erecting another market-house, as required. This site should be built up with stores and residences, which would add to the appearance of the avenue, and the business and wealth of the city.

THE CANAL NUISANCE.

I invite your serious consideration to the subject of the canal, many propositions for the improvement of which have been made and discussed, both in Councils and in Congress. In my opinion, it is worthless as a means of transportation, and so long as it remains open, it will be a plague spot and a means of engendering disease all over the city. Experience has proved clearly that it cannot be kept clean in its present condition. After all the expense incurred to renovate and cleanse it, it is there bearing ample testimony to all sensible minds, that it is a festering nuisance, sending forth from its beds of filth and scum its messengers of death to our population. I can see no other way to dispose of it than to contract its width to, say twenty feet, arch and cover it, so that it may serve the purpose of a sewer for the city, and an outlet for the waters of the Tiber. By a bulkhead at Seventeenth street, and by paving or planking the bottom of the arch, it could be daily cleansed by a flood of water pouring through it from end to end, and thus the nuisance will be abated.

It may be said that this would require a large outlay of money, but, in answer to that, it is safe to assume that the reclaimed ground would sell for much more than the cost of the work, to say nothing of the advantages that would result from the abatement of the nuisance.

I have thrown out these crude suggestions for the consideration of the Councils. If they prefer and shall agree upon any other feasible plan of disposing of this troublesome matter, I shall be glad to co-operate with them in the undertaking. Until a system of sewerage and drainage be introduced and carried out—such as the financial condition of the city will not admit of our undertaking for several years to come—we must use this channel for that purpose; but the time will arrive when it will be necessary only for drainage and for an outlet, as before stated, of the Tiber.

STREET RAILROADS AND REPAIRS.

By the charter of the street railroads in the city the companies are required to keep the tracks, the spaces between the tracks, and for two feet outside the outer rails, well paved and in good order. It is well known to all, particularly those who have occasion to drive on the streets where these roads are located, that very little attention has been and is being paid to these requirements.

As this is a grievance of which our citizens justly complain, I have deemed it my duty to call your attention to it, and ask such action in the premises as in your judgment the case requires. At the same time I would suggest that these corporations should not be allowed any special priviliges from the city authorities beyond those derived from their charters.

THE CONTRACT SUSTEM.

I recommend the abrogation or repeal of all laws of the Corporation requiring that work on any of the streets or sewers shall be done by contract. Under the system of contracts, as it has been carried out, the city has been robbed of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Jobs that would disgrace any city or people have been passed and paid for as completed, according to the requirements of the contracts, when in not a single feature have the contracts been complied with. Street pavements and sidewalks have been laid in mud, when the contractors were required to lay them in nine to twelve inches of sand or gravel, thus receiving pay for removing earth they never touched, and for using sand they never saw. Indeed, it is a common remark that no one has seen for years a job done for the

Corporation according to the terms of the contract. The consequence has been that our pavements have had to be relaid nearly every year. Our sidewalks have become quagmires after every heavy rain, and when the frost is coming out of the ground in the spring; our sewers have burst and tumbled in, carrying with them men, teams and carriages, involving the city in litigation, damages, and costs. The streets "gravelled" with mud, (as they have been in most cases,) have been cut up into gutters, requiring constant repairs The materials used have been of the meanest and least valuable kind possible to be procured; in fact, everything that could be has been done to swindle the taxpayers, and fill the pockets of contractors and their aiders and abettors.

Such is the natural result of the system, such the demoralization that is sure to follow in its train. To prevent it I would have all work of the kind performed by men hired by the day or week, who should be placed under the charge of commissioners for each ward, to be elected by the Councils and Mayor in joint convention, and the whole work to be controlled by two competent engineers and superintendents of streets and sewers, to be chosen in the same manner, and to be removable, as other officers now are, at the pleasure of the Mayor. By this means employment and prompt pay will be given, and the benefits of Corporation labor be distributed alike to all classes, regardless of race or color Nor will laboring men be subject to be defrauded of their earnings by dishonest contractors.

STREET REPAIRS.

The great width of our streets operates as a drawback on our ability to pave and keep them in good repair. The roadways in all of them, in my opinion, are unnecessarily wide, and they could be contracted from fifteen to twenty feet without inconvenience and with very little expense, by setting curbstones farther into the streets, and using the space between the pavement line and the curbstone so set for a grass plat and for planting trees. This is being done in many Northern cities, and I am satisfied it could be done here with advantage to the streets, with economy, and at the same it will add greatly to the health and beauty of the city, I recommend, in all cases where streets

are to be paved in future, that authority be given to contract the width of the same as indicated.

The practice of putting down gas and water mains in the middle of the streets is, in my opinion, very objectionable. It involves the necessity of opening the street to tap the mains or repair the service pipes, as well as a large expense for excavating the trench and the necessary length of pipe to reach from the footwalk to the centre of the street. All this can be avoided by laying mains of one-half the capacity of those required to furnish a supply to both sides of the street near the curbstone on each side, which can readily be reached by the occupants of the buildings without cutting into the street, thus saving the cost of excavation and from thirty to forty feet of pipe to each individual. Besides, the streets could then be easily kept in good condition, and not be subject to being trenched every few feet by those wishing to tap the mains or repair the pipes leading to their houses. It will cost little more to lay these two small mains than the large one, and when the additional cost of trenching and pipe is taken into the account it will be readily seen that the two pipes would be a matter of great economy as well as convenience.

THE CITY HALL.

The City Hall building, all will agree, requires repairs, and the offices and rooms occupied by the officers of the corporation require furnishing. I recommend that an appropriation be made to paint and refit the west wing of the building, and that the work be done as early as possible. The grounds around the Hall are also in a wretched condition, and should be improved at once.

THE NEW JAIL.

Legislation is now pending in Congress relating to the construction of a new jail for this District, and involving the city in a heavy debt in connection with it. It is important that the subject should receive the attention of the city authorities, in order that it may not be unrepresented on the commission having the work in charge and for which it is required to pay nearly one-half the expense.

OUR MUNICIPAL TROUBLES

It is, perhaps, needless for me to call your attention to the fact, known to you all, of the illegal and presumptuous action of a portion of the members of the Board of Aldermen and Board of Common Council since the regular organization of the two Boards on the 8th instant. By a factious and revolutionary proceeding they have managed to keep one of the Boards without a quorum, thus preventing legislation and inflicting a lasting injury upon the city. By an assumption of power they pretended to elect, and went through the farce of inaugurating, a man whom they denominate "Mayor *ad interim*," and who had the audacity to call at my office and demand that I should vacate the Mayor's rooms and turn over possession to him! This man has actually issued orders to a certain officer, and perhaps others, assuming the prerogative of Mayor of this city, and on his order two or more culprits have been turned loose from the workhouse! How far are these things to be suffered to go? The time will come when this conspiracy must end, and in the opinion of our best citizens that time has already arrived. The interest of the public cannot be allowed to suffer for an indefinite period by the action of a few conspiring factionists and disorganizers. The criminal laws should be appealed to, or such action taken as will correct the existing condition of things. I leave the matter in your hands, assuring you of my co-operation in whatever legal course you may think proper to pursue.

NORTH CAPITOL STREET.

The rapid improvement of that part of the city lying north of the Capitol renders it necessary and proper that North Capitol street should be immediately opened and put in a condition to travel. The obstructions on that wide and beautiful street, placed there by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, have retarded the progress of the city in the vicinity of the Capitol and north to the city boundary. But for this North Capitol street and the streets adjoining, would now present a beautiful prospect from the Capitol, and be built up with handsome residences. As it is there is no part of our city that presents a more forbidding appearance, and none that is more

often seen by strangers visiting the metropolis who wonder why this portion remains a desert place. It is really a disgrace, and it becomes the city authorities to exert themselves to have a remedy applied. If proper efforts were made the railroad obstructions could be removed, and an appropriation secured from Congress to grade and gravel North Capitol street, from the Capitol to the boundary of the city.

THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

The difficulty of access from the Capitol to the Government Printing Office, especially in winter, when all the travel between the two places is necessarily through New Jersey avenue and H street will be a sufficient plea to cause favorable action by Congress in this matter. As I understand it, the wide streets leading directly from the Capitol, East Capitol and South Capitol streets, are under the jurisdiction of the United States, and are to be graded by the Government. Appropriations have already been made by Congress for grading East Capitol street, and surely it is quite as necessary to have North Capitol street opened for travel at this time as that running east from the Capitol. Indeed, there are many considerations in favor of the former that do not exist in regard to the latter.

IMPROVING CERTAIN AVENUES.

The work of grading and gravelling Virginia and Delaware avenues should be continued till the same are opened their entire length.

This work has become a necessity. The difficulty of travelling on them, washed as they have been by heavy rains, and guttered from end to end, is a source of serious inconvenience to the large population residing on and near them who have a right to expect that the Government should put and keep them in good travelling condition. Louisiana and Indiana avenues should also be repaired and paved without delay. The horrible condition of these avenues for several winters past has rendered travel on them difficult and dangerous.

Congress has exclusive jurisdiction over these thoroughfares and it is reasonable to expect that the General Government will do its part in improving and keeping in proper order such

streets and avenues as it assumes to control. It is proper therefore that application be made to Congress for an appropriation necessary for this purpose, to be made before the close of the present session.

The prosecution of these necessary works will give employment to many persons brought here by the exigencies of the war, who are now idle in consequence of the reduction of force hitherto employed in the different branches of mechanical and other labor. That there is much suffering in our midst amongst these people is but too well known, and it is but just and proper that every effort be made to relieve their wants by securing situations for them where they can be profitably employed.

MAJOR A. C. RICHARDS.

It may not be improper for me now to refer to recent events that have transpired in this city.

While we may congratulate ourselves that by a prompt and honest course we have been enabled to maintain the rights fairly accorded to us by the people in the late election, it is only due to an upright and conscientious public officer (I mean Major A. C. Richards, the able Superintendent of Police,) to say that but for his promptitude and foresight a final settlement might have been delayed, or only attained through scenes of violence and bloodshed

REFORMS CONTEMPLATED.

It is my earnest desire to begin, if not to complete, during my administration of this municipality, such reforms and improvements as will make the city of Washington what the Capital of the United States should be. Probably no city government in the nation has ever been longer or more persistently misruled than this; and none certainly has been made the object of such generosity on the part of the people's representatives. Instead of being an example and a model of honesty in its officials, rigor in the collection and integrity in the disbursement of its revenues, it has rather been a warning to others in the looseness, the favoritism, and the utter recklessness that have pervaded most of its departments. Of course it cannot be expected that a new administration can cure evils that have become almost chronic within a short period of time, especially obstructed as I

have been, and those who co-operate with me, by a bitter and unceasing opposition. But entering upon my duties with a sincere desire to promote the general welfare and to preserve the public peace, I am not without hope that even those who have allowed themselves to be misled by prejudice or party will finally see that it is their true interest to sustain the new administration in all the efforts it is resolved to make for the general improvement and progress of the city.

The moment Congress is convinced that we mean to fulfil our pledges—that we mean to pay our debts and to conduct our affairs frugally and carefully—we shall almost be anticipated in our enterprises, and will rarely ask in vain from the representatives of the people.

PROSPECTS OF WASHINGTON.

There is no reason why Washington should not become a great manufacturing and commercial city, nor why more great railroads connecting it North and South should not be projected and completed. Our advantages of climate, position, neighborhood of the ocean, and profusion of water power, have been so often commented upon as to render any lengthy reference to them unnecessary; but I may be pardoned an allusion to the fact that since the overthrow of the rebellion new attractions are offered to emigration by the necessity and advantages of settling and cultivating the vast bodies of land in and near the District of Columbia. Emigration met at New York by agents from the West, who do their utmost to set forth the superior claims of the great domain owned by the companies they represent, has been steadily diverted from the South; but now that slavery has been destroyed, foreigners seeking homes for themselves in this country will naturally turn to the section nearest the market, and can be readily induced to come here and make their homes in the vicinity of the capital of the nation. The same sagacity and perseverance which have done so much to people our new States and Territories, if applied to the adjacent rich lands in Virginia and Maryland, would not only give us a thriving population but would add materially to the strength and perpetuity of the Government itself.

HOW TO RETAIN THE CAPITAL.

I know that I speak not only for the people who honored me with their suffrages at the late election, but for very many who voted against me, when I say that there is an earnest, nay, an intense desire on their part to do everything to maintain the seat of government in this ten miles square. Not only personal interests, but the highest public considerations should make us act together in all matters relating to the solid prosperity of Washington city. However partisans may rail at their successful rivals, and deny that their efforts are being used to the damage of this beautiful city, and however the movements in Congress may be traduced and misunderstood, no reasonable man can doubt that a long continuance in such violent scenes as have recently disgraced this metropolis will ultimately, and probably too soon, result in a concerted effort for the removal of the capital. Let it be our duty, by good order, by integrity in our government, by the cultivation of the arts of peace and kind feeling among ourselves, and above all by exhibiting a constant and grateful attachment to our common country, to disarm all such efforts, so that our firmest and fastest friends will be found in those guardians who have, under the Constitution of the United States, exclusive jurisdiction over the District of Columbia.

S. J. BOWEN, Mayor.

June 29th 1868

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